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The discursive reconstruction of memory and national identity: The anti-war memorial the Island of Ireland Peace Park.

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Abstract

This article explores how the Island of Ireland Peace Park, opened in 1998 in Belgium, intervenes in the discursive construction of national identity using the 'memory' of the First World War. Analysing memory as a discourse it examines how the texts within the Park and their use in practices produce meanings which challenge the hierarchical binary of 'Irish/British', itself a product, in part, of previous memory work involving the war, and thus present the possibility of reimagined forms of subjectivity and reconceived senses of national identity. It goes on to argue that the Park's design as an unheroic anti-war memorial also intertextually challenges identities dependent on engagement in physical conflict on the island. In both ways the Park works as part of the 'Northern Ireland Peace Process' and can be read not only as a monument to the dead of the First World War but also as a 'Troubles' memorial.

Keywords

Anti-war memorial, discourse, First World War, memory, national identity, Northern Ireland Peace Process, remembrance, Troubles memorial.

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Introduction

The Island of Ireland Peace Park, at Messines in Belgium, is an example of a monument whose design and use is explicitly aimed at mobilising the memory it constructs of the past in order to intervene in the political discourses of the present. In this article I will describe how it came into being, how its construction was designed to address the ‘forgotten’ memory of Irish involvement in the Great War and how ‘memories’ of that war were, and continue to be, used in the construction of ‘Irish’ and ‘British’ national identity on the island of Ireland. I will also explain how this monument has been used to work towards peace in Northern Ireland. This will involve an analysis of how the various texts in the park, and the practices they are used in, work to re-shape the collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992), and thus the discourse, of both the Great War and also violent conflict more generally. It is this latter function of the Park that enables it to be understood as both an ‘anti-war memorial’ as well as a memorial to all the dead of the Northern Irish ‘Troubles’¹.

Collective memory can most usefully be understood using Foucault’s (1972) conceptualisation of a discursive construction. Such a discourse is the outcome of an accumulation of texts and practices produced, distributed, maintained and policed by institutions within society. As such it is subject to relations of power within society and these power relations work to establish what is generally perceived as the truth within particular domains of knowledge. The article will, therefore, examine not only the memorial as a text and its use in practices but also the range of institutions involved in its

design and construction as a textual materialisation of memory and its subsequent use in practices of 'remembering'.

The Peace Park intervenes in the discourses of both 'Ireland' and 'the Great War' as well as a range of related discourses – Unionism, Nationalism, Britishness, Irishness and martial glory. In doing so it is aimed at shaping these discourses in such a way as to present the possibility of reimagined forms of subjectivity – experienced as rediscovered Irish and British identities, with a changed perception of the connection between the two. It also asks questions, although more problematically, of identities dependent on engagement in physical conflict. In all of these ways, and with a specific focus on the last, this memorial intervenes in the Northern Ireland 'Peace Process'.

Approaching the memorial as a stage upon which meanings, and particularly meanings related to the nation, are constructed and displayed, is informed by Pierre Nora's (1996) concept of the *lieu de mémoire*, variously translated as realm or site of memory. The fluidity of such meanings was a crucial element of his concept. The Derridean perspective on meaning that this awareness relates to certainly informs my approach to making sense of this memorial and also cautions me to disclaim any universality to the interpretations I will provide in this reading. It is based in a poststructuralist, anti-essentialist perspective which seeks to identify and explore the ways in which the fluidity of meaning, produced intertextually, is temporarily fixed, made myth, using Barthes' (1972) term, depoliticised and naturalised before subsequently being re-politicised, denaturalised, de-mythologised and reshaped through discursive interventions. In exploring these changes I will be helped by Alieda Assman's conceptualisation of active and passive memory, the organisation of the two into a canon and archive respectively and the role in this process of different types of 'forgetting'.

In exploring the significance of war memorials and commemorative practices such as Remembrance of the First World War I am working with the insights of several writers. Jay Winter (1995) focused on memorialisation of this conflict and argued that the materialisation of the dead in the memorial enabled their separation from the living and thus facilitated the process of mourning by allowing forgetting. With the passage of a century, and bearing in mind the ‘forgotten’ role of many being commemorated there, I would argue that it is reconnection rather than separation that is now taking place at the Peace Park. Yet its potential role in regard to the more recent Troubles might well be partly understood using Winter’s theory. Also useful is his (2010) observation that all such sites of memory materialise a moral message. Mosse (1990) would argue that this moral message typically uses the dominant construction of the soldier’s death as ‘self-sacrifice’ as part of what Bushaway (1992) argues was the fixing of the meaning of the war through the language of Remembrance. This closed down political argument about the lessons that should be learnt from the war and supported the political status quo. One of the techniques used was a deliberate reticence (King, 1999) in both memorial design and ceremonial content – most centrally the Silence – which enabled a plurality of interpretations by those unified through the activity of the ritual. For some writers (e.g. MacDonald, 2006 and Becksteads et al, 2011) this lack of words was replaced by the affective agency of the very materials of the memorials. The Peace Park certainly makes use, most obviously in its central tower and its granite slabs, of the scale and texture of its materials. One must be careful, however, when attributing affective agency to materials, not to underplay the role discourse plays in promoting particular ‘sensual’ reactions to the world around us and also not to overstate the greater precision of meanings of actual words compared to ‘words in stone’.

The function of war memorials in the construction and maintenance of the nation will be dealt with when looking at the case of Ireland below. Their role in reconciliation is equally complex and my exploration of the Peace Park's potential for this is informed not only by those writers mentioned above but also, in particular, Clark (2013), Govier (2009), and Prost (1997). Clark, studying the Croatian town of Vukovar, argued that the proliferation of war memorials and commemorations in the town was a serious impediment to reconciliation. It kept memories raw, suppressed divergent narratives and thus worked to sustain a separation of Serb and Croat. Partisan memorials in Northern Ireland to the dead of the Troubles could be seen to similarly reproduce oppositional identities and thus have the same negative impact on attempts at reconciliation. The positioning of this memorial in Belgium, however, can be understood, after Prost (1997), as producing meanings untainted by the deep associations of demarcated space. Its ostensible focus on another conflict is also, clearly, crucial. The war being remembered has greater potential for the establishing of 'shared truths', shared memorials and the practice of shared ceremonies. The shared memorial might not be to the Troubles but it enables the establishment of shared truths about shared suffering in the First World War that are then intertextually implicitly mobilised to encourage the acknowledgement of shared suffering in the Troubles and this includes the 'aversive acknowledgement' which Govier (2009) argues is essential for any possible reconciliation.

It is the power of this allusive, intertextual exploitation and shaping of memory in the cause of civic, national and international reconciliation that is, perhaps, the key lesson to be learnt from examining the example of the Island of Ireland Peace Park. The choice of location undermines the certainties of locally sustained discourses of identity and enables 'fraternisation' and reflection. The choice of focus shifts time and redoubles the potential for the questioning of received truths. Lastly, the choice of 'voices' and

the manner of their presentation challenges the myth of martial glory and turns this into an 'anti-war memorial'. I shall now explain how this has been achieved.

Memory, nation and the Great War in Ireland: The reason for the project

The different histories of Remembrance of the Great War in the two polities that came to be constructed on the island of Ireland after the conflict can be understood as illustrating some of the ways in which the past is utilised in the project of nation-building. In the 'Irish Free State', Irish, and particularly Irish nationalist, service in the British Army during the Great War did not fit in to the national story being constructed. Remembrance of the war was a widespread but politically contentious practice. Over time it became marginalised, retreated into the semi-private spaces of the Southern Protestants and Unionists, and gradually fell out of the collective memory of the nation (Leonard, 1996; Burke, 2004; Rigney, 2008). By contrast, the Unionists of 'Northern Ireland' centralised commemoration of the 'sacrifices' they had made out of loyalty to the Crown, particularly at the Somme (see e.g. Loughlin, 2002). For the dominant groups within each polity the categories of 'Irish Nationalist' and 'British Soldier' were constructed as binary opposites and, as Derrida (1976) pointed out, such organising binary oppositions are always designed to be hierarchical and thus not only separate out, and therefore identify, a self and an Other, but also establish the relative value of both. Anderson (1983) argued that an essential element in the construction of the 'imagined community' of the nation and national identity is the perception of 'ourselves' sharing experiences. The role of memory in this imaginative work could be seen as the construction of an 'imagined community through time' by extending such communion into a past that lends a permanence and thus authenticity to identity

differences and claims of sovereignty. Thus did the differing values and meanings of Remembrance help to imaginatively solidify the new border on the island of Ireland.

As the signifying practice of Remembrance expanded to acknowledge the deaths of British troops in subsequent conflicts, this eventually came to include those being killed in the war with Irish Republicans in the North. Whilst this further problematized engagement with Remembrance for Irish Nationalists it was the shooting dead, on 'Bloody Sunday' in 1972 in Derry, of 13 unarmed protesters by British paratroopers that made any subsequent commemoration of British soldiers almost impossible in 'Irish' circles.

The 'Poppy Day Massacre' – the detonation of an IRA bomb at a Remembrance Sunday ceremony killing 11 civilians in Enniskillen in 1987 – demonstrated the extent to which the texts and practices of Remembrance in Northern Ireland had come to be seen as part of the symbolism of Loyalism, imperialism and Britishness. Any connection with an 'Irish' past, and certainly an Irish nationalist past had been 'forgotten'. This divergence of memories of the war on the island can be seen as an example of the result of what Alida Assman categorised as 'active' and 'passive' memory and the construction of a 'canon' and 'archive' respectively (2010: 98-106). In Northern Ireland memories of the Great War were actively and regularly maintained and reproduced by Unionists. They became a learnt pantheon of 'canonised' heroes, martyrs and battles and connection with them was taught at granny's knee, woven into banners and paraded in the city streets. In the Republic these memories were, largely, put away, archived, unmentioned and, eventually, for large sections of the population, forgotten. Some of this 'forgetting' could be described as 'passive' using Assman's term i.e. the neglecting, losing and abandoning of previously active memories. But her definition of 'active' forgetting – the deliberate trashing and erasing of memory and the construction of taboos – is also useful in theorising the function

of the violent reaction to Remembrance exhibited by Republicans in the streets of Dublin in the 1920s and which resurfaced decades later at Enniskillen. The different memories of the Great War constructed through this range of processes fed into discourses of national identity and, within Northern Ireland, were part of the discourses of division which the 'Peace Process' had to attempt to break down.

It is within the context of such divergent 'memories' and political uses of the Great War that the creation of the Peace Park needs to be understood. Its genesis in 1996 saw a party of 50 set off from Ireland for a tour of the battlefields, cemeteries and memorials in France and Belgium. This 'fact-finding trip' was the idea of Paddy Harte, up until a few months before a long-standing Fine Gael TD (member of parliament) representing Donegal in the Republic of Ireland, who had recently made his first visit to these sites. Among those he took with him was someone he knew from 'cross-community' work in the North – Glen Barr from Derry/Londonderry, once a union official, a Loyalist paramilitary leader with the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and subsequently a community worker running training schemes for young people. They went to various sites on the Somme; experienced the unsettling blend of serene calm and buried horror of the war cemeteries and the mind-defeating scale of the list of names of the missing carved into the enormous Thiepval monument. It was, according to Barr, a very emotional day².

Close to the Thiepval monument they visited the impressive Ulster Tower erected in commemoration of the losses of the 36th (Ulster) Division during the Battle of the Somme. This division mainly comprised the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the militia raised in the north-east of the island in 1913 to resist the 'imposition' of Home Rule. Although it did contain some Catholics (see Grayson's (2009) intervention in this history) the vast majority of the 36th's members were drawn from the ranks of Protestant Unionism of all classes with the bulk of the 'men' being working class Loyalists. Among them had been Barr's father and nine of his uncles on both his father and mother's sides of the family. The Division had been

part of the disastrous attack on the first day of the battle on 1st July 1916 when they had suffered over 5000 casualties. In Northern Ireland this event was to take on a central role in the Unionist collective memory of the war.

After this stop the tour group moved on to the nearby village of Guillemont. In September of 1916, here and at the neighbouring village of Ginchy, it had been the tragic turn of the 16th (Irish) Division. The Division had similar origins to the 36th, having been formed largely from the Irish Volunteers raised to oppose the UVF and *ensure* the establishment of Home Rule. At the outbreak of the war their nationalist leaders urged them to enlist in the British Army to demonstrate Ireland's loyalty to the Crown in the hope that this would ensure a speedy and satisfactory implementation of Home Rule when the war ended. Tens of thousands joined the British forces and particularly the 16th (Irish) Division. At the Somme they were to suffer a similar fate to that of their erstwhile opponents. In a few days they suffered over 4000 casualties. Their story was not, however, to loom large in the publically curated 'collective memory' of their descendants. There is a memorial – a granite Celtic cross outside a disused church – but at the time of this visit the railings around it were rusted and the site uncared for. The party commented, with a mixture of sorrow, anger and guilt, at the discrepancy between the two main memorials to the Irish on the Somme. Harte and Barr resolved to do something about it. Within two years the 'Island of Ireland Peace Park' was opened.

Their first step was to initiate discussions aimed at producing what they felt would be both a more fitting monument and also a tool for peace-making (Harte, 2010; also interview with Barr by author). Initially the idea was to place some sort of new memorial at Guillemont in memory of the 16th Division but then, with the hoped-for reconciliatory function in mind, a more symbolically significant site was selected. In June 1917 the 16th and 36th Divisions had found themselves positioned next to each other

in the British trenches. In the battle of Messines Ridge these two groups, largely made up of the opposing 'Pro-' and 'Anti-' Home Rule militias, fought alongside rather than against each other. Barr and Harte launched their organisation – 'A Journey of Reconciliation' – and set about raising funds to build a memorial at the site which would use its potential for the construction of a *shared* history.

They quickly found they were pushing at an open door. A range of influential institutions agreed to support the project. Some, including both the Irish Republic and UK governments, provided money. The financial support of the Fianna Fail government (historically seen as the more 'Republican' of the two main parties) was seen by Harte as encouraging similar support from a wide range of businesses on the island (2010: 78). Others provided logistical assistance, expertise and materials. A group of religious ministers that could be seen to represent both nationalist and unionist 'communities' agreed to act as the trustees. Barr brought his trainees, both Catholic and Protestant, over from Derry to help with the work on the site. The Park was opened by the heads of state, President Mary McAleese and Queen Elizabeth II on Armistice Day 11th November 1998 (Harte, 2010: 88). Their presence confirmed the patronage of these two hugely influential institutions on the island.

This first joint public appearance by the two came only a few months after the signing of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement and at a time when agreement between the parties in Northern Ireland was far from settled, killings were continuing and forensic experts were still working their way through the wreckage of the Omagh bombing – responsible for the greatest loss of life in one incident in the entire thirty years of the Troubles. This symbolic commemoration of a shared memory by the two marked a new stage in the construction of a discourse of reconciliation. At this meeting McAleese expressed her hope that the Queen would soon be able to visit the Republic, which would be the first such visit by a UK head of state since the 1916 uprising (Harte, 2010: 93). It took a further 13 years before such a visit took

place and when it did memory and war memorials played a very prominent role in the carefully choreographed rituals of reconciliation.

The Island of Ireland Peace Park as text

The signifier dominating the Park is a 34 metre high round tower of the style that featured in religious sites across Ireland between the 9th and 12th century (see Figure 1). No other structure at the heart of the site could so unequivocally have signified that this was an 'Irish' space. In the centre of the small round room at its base an inverse stone relief of the island of Ireland bears no marked borders. This signification of Ireland as a whole, rather than divided, entity is also the clear aim of many of the other symbols in the park. Four stones bear the names of the 'four green fields' of the island: the provinces of Munster, Leinster, Ulster and Connaught. Ulster here not the last – an afterthought – but with others at each shoulder. Another stone is filled with the names of all thirty two counties. There are no gaps nor any punctuation. They run into one another and tumble across the ends and beginnings of lines without any heed of individual names: with no boundaries, no borders. These texts work metonymically and metaphorically to signify the indivisibility of the island and, in the context of the site, extend the logic of this indivisibility to its population. Another three stones emphasise the island-wide impact of the Great War by carrying the grim statistics of casualties suffered not only by the famous UVF-filled 36th (Ulster) division (32,186) but also by the 16th (Irish) (28,398) and 10th (Irish) (9,363). This inclusivity is also signified and facilitated by the use of both Irish and English in the first inscriptions one encounters in the park. At the entrance the gateposts bear plaques naming it as both 'Páirc síochana d'oileán na hEireánn' and the 'Island of Ireland Peace Park'. The presence of the highly politicised language of Irish cultural nationalism at the site is a vivid signifier of its difference from all the Commonwealth War Graves

Commission's (CWGC) 'British' cemeteries in the surrounding countryside and also from the majority of the numerous war memorials back home on the island of Ireland. Further information is placed just inside the gateway in both languages as well as Flemish and French. This reminds us that the site is, significantly, placed in territory where two language communities co-exist within the one state (at the time of writing...).

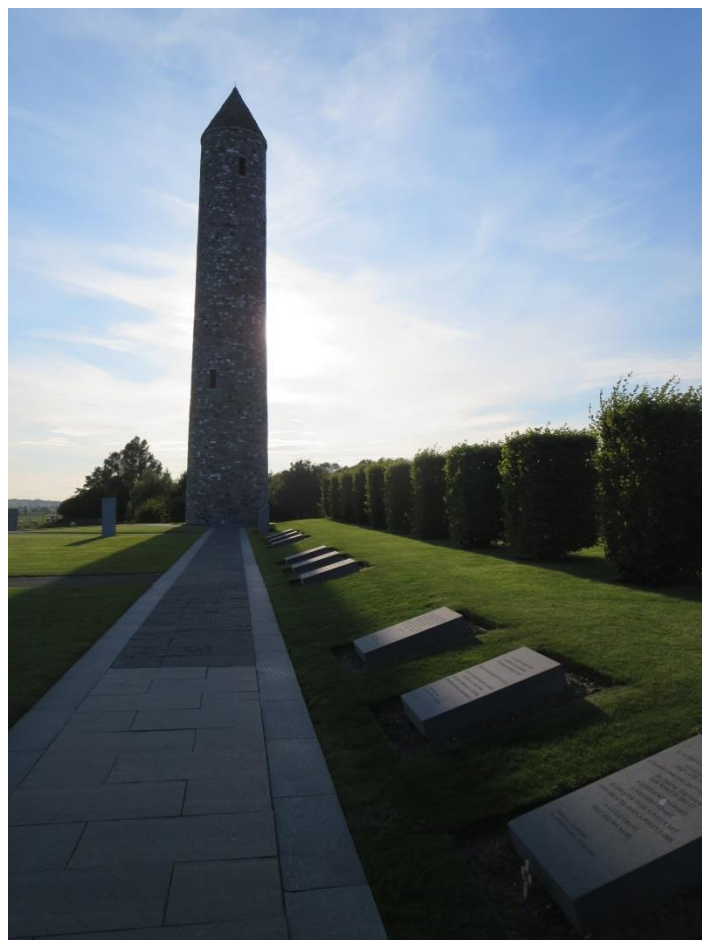


Fig.1. The approach to the Tower: photo John Poulter

The rest of the texts in the park work to both construct a discourse of shared suffering and also a critique of the reverence with which the war is remembered by many within the Unionist and British population. In the process, and particularly because of links established intertextually on the streets of Northern Ireland between the person of the Great War soldier and the Loyalist paramilitary (see below), and more generally all paramilitaries and all soldiers, the texts also work to critique *all* war and *all* violence.

As the tower is approached, three groups of three horizontal inscribed 'gravestones' present the words of witnesses to the events of the war (see Figure 1). Down the road at the CWGC 'British Cemetery' the standard inscription on the 'Stone of Remembrance' is the line Rudyard Kipling, whose only son died in the Irish Guards during the war, chose for the purpose from the Bible – 'Their Name Liveth for Evermore' – and the headstones provide us with little more than these names and in some cases not even that. 'A soldier of the Great War: known unto God' is the most that can be offered for many. In the Peace Park the 'gravestones' provide much more vivid material to shape the discourse of the war: to shape the 'memory' of the war. Even their construction works toward this end. In the CWGC cemetery the white Portland stone of the memorials and headstones sitting within the neatly trimmed greenery signifies anything but the carnage and decay of the battlefield. In the Peace Park the 'gravestones' and other memorials are constructed from blocks of grey granite. The cutting of the stone reveals a naturally pock-marked surface. On the grey day I first visited they seemed to signify death and decay.

The 'witness statements' inscribed upon them and taken from the letters, diaries, memoirs and poems of soldiers, can be argued to fall into three categories: 'descriptive', 'romantic' and 'bitter'. Each set of three contains one from each category. The 'descriptive' stones construct the war from detailed moments. Terence Poulter reports the soldiers' joy at the moment of the Armistice. J.F.B. O'Sullivan

brings to life the chaotic terror of a 'hissing and shrieking pandemonium' as a 'cyclone of bursting shells enveloped us'. Whilst Chaplain Francis Gleeson gauntly describes the aftermath of such an attack:

Spent all night trying to console, aid and remove the wounded. It was ghastly to see them lying there in the cold, cheerless outhouses, on bare stretchers, with no blankets to cover their freezing limbs.

All three, in the course of their descriptions, construct the common soldier as terrified, neglected and ultimately delighted to see the end of the war.

The quote from *Soliloquy* by poet Francis Ledwidge proclaims his belief that he was blessed to be part of the war but he is alone here in expressing such a sentiment. As an active, and republican leaning, nationalist during his life and with his best known poem – *Lament for Thomas MacDonagh* – mourning the executed Easter rebel and fellow poet, this soldier poet of the British Army perfectly illustrates the complexity of Irish engagement with the Great War.

Patrick MacGill's verse, taken from *A Lament*, is not in the same warrior-poet vein. Twice it attempts to strike a mawkishly sentimental note but the latter half of each sentence has a bleaker and more despairing edge. It concludes – 'They'll call me coward if I return, but hero if I fall'.

Tom Kettle, like Ledwidge, anticipated his approaching death and wrote the verse *To my daughter, Betty, the gift of God* cited here, only a few days before being killed. In it he retains a belief in a principled death but makes it clear that he died 'not for flag, nor King, nor Emperor'. What he believes he did die for one assumes is the idea of Irish nationhood and freedom but one can only deduce this because of familiarity with this MP's Irish Nationalist politics. His description of his cause as 'a dream born in a herdsman's shed and the secret scripture of the poor' is otherwise enigmatic. What is not in

doubt is the self-criticism the verse contains for him, and his countrymen, 'we fools, now with the foolish dead', finding themselves dying in the uniform of the King a few weeks after the 'Easter Rising' in Dublin had rendered futile their efforts to demonstrate Ireland's loyalty to the Crown.

Such a critical stance leads us on to my final category of the 'bitter' statements. These include the lean poetry of the official war artist William Orpen. Whilst many of his works were of gallant officers and sage generals he also drew and painted the destruction and misery of the trenches. Here he captures in words this experience of impersonal, sudden, mechanised death in a wasted landscape:

I mean / the simple soldier man, / who, when the / Great War first began, / just died, stone
dead / from lumps of lead, / in mire. (taken from the poem *Myself, Hate and Love*)

Captain Charles Miller also focuses on the mud that gave Ypres, and particularly the Battle of Passchendaele, an additional horror:

As it was the Ypres battlefield just represented one gigantic slough of despond into which
floundered battalions, brigades and divisions of infantry without end, to be shot to pieces or
drowned, until at last and with immeasurable slaughter we had gained a few miles of liquid
mud.

This railing against the futility of the slaughter is, thanks to the British 'War Poets', and particularly Owen and Sassoon, a familiar, if contested, part of the 'British' 'memory' of the war but rarely, if ever, is it represented so explicitly and permanently, *carved in stone*, in official memorials to the conflict. It is this radical use of the powerful and permanent materiality of the masonry of memory that is perhaps the most striking aspect of the Park for all visitors. The monumental power of such texts is harnessed for a contrary and subversive purpose. The final 'gravestone' on the approach to the tower (see Figure 2)

provides the most striking example of this as it departs even more dramatically from the conventional construction of stories of gallant and willing sacrifice in a noble cause usually present at war memorials. Here the words taken from the memoir of Private David Starrett, originally of the UVF and then batman to Brigadier General Crozier, stand as a stark accusation of the exploitation and destruction of the poor soldier in the interests of the greedy rich.

So the curtain fell over that tortured country of unmarked graves and unburied fragments of men. Murder and massacre: the innocent slaughtered for the guilty. The poor man for the sake of the greed of the already rich: the man of no authority made the victim of the man who had gathered importance and wished to keep it.

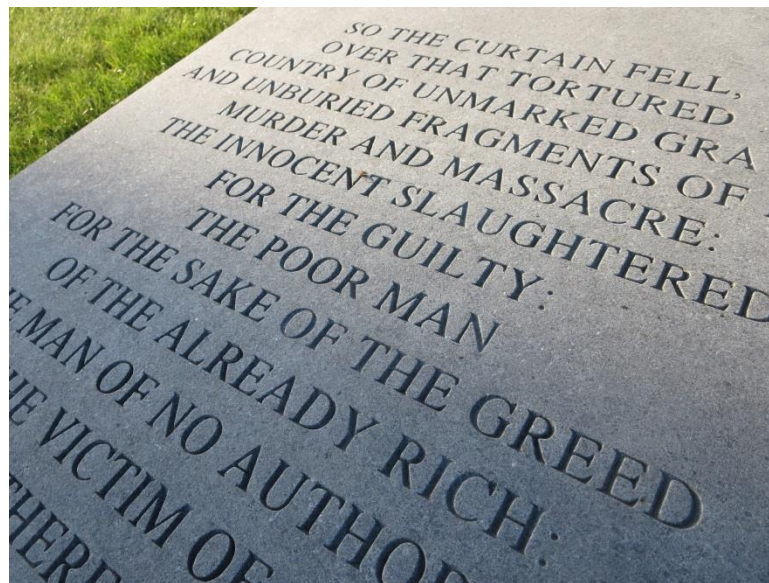


Fig.2. Private Starrett's statement (detail): photo John Poulter

There are other First World War memorials that make such statements about the guilt of the rich in the war – Eric Gill's relief depiction of Jesus driving the money-changers from the temple, at the University

of Leeds, is one example – but they are rare. This can be understood not only in terms of relations of power but also as a consequence of the circumstances of general loss in which the vast majority of the monuments were constructed. Only a few years after the war the numbers of still grieving bereaved encouraged those designing such memorials not to materialise in stone the doubts some had about the price ‘the nation’ had paid for victory. They had not, could not, have died in vain. ‘The Glorious Dead’ was a sentiment carved into the Cenotaph in London and echoed, literally or figuratively, on monuments throughout the British Empire and beyond. But the shaping of the memorial discourse in this way was also a result of the play of power. Those who were most likely to see little gain for their losses, the workless poor, were also those least able to influence the design and wording of memorials (see for example Mark Connelly’s (2002) detailing of the case of the City of London). To question the point of the war was to question the wisdom, morality and authority of those who had overseen and sanctioned it. Sanctifying the dead whilst also glorifying the war thus served the purposes of both offering some comfort to the bereaved and also maintaining the status quo.

As Foucault observed: ‘if one controls people’s memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles. Just what the Resistance was, must no longer be known...’ (2011[1974]:253)

Thus the discursive practice of politics has memory at its heart. What ‘the Somme’ was must no longer be known. ‘The Somme’ becomes a resource to be shaped and mobilised to legitimate a particular political position and to maintain the status quo. Oppositional voices attempting to present *their* version of this past face the daunting task of unsettling what quickly becomes ‘myth’ in Barthes’ (1972) usage – the depoliticised ‘truth’ about the past.

In the case of the Peace Park, by deliberately setting out to create a memorial that would be acceptable to all parties on the island the planners had to include perspectives not normally allowed a voice in such designs. In particular this meant including views of the war that would be typical of both Republicans and internationalist socialists – who didn't just privately doubt but publically rejected the 'myth' of the war as either necessary or glorious. Including such previously excluded voices leads to the denaturalising and re-politicising of such established meanings and provides the opportunity for the potential reshaping of the discourses involved – the war, nationalism, loyalty, sacrifice, duty, etc. Thus the memorial intervenes in the discourse and attempts to shape the memory of the war to show its brutality, its horror and its waste.

This challenging of the discourse of martial glory is clearly one of the key aims of the memorial as it works to change the conflict in Northern Ireland. A plaque inscribed with a 'Peace Pledge' is affixed to another stone (see Figure 3). The writers of the pledge, having described the 'carnage' that occurred at this spot in the past, 'condemn war, and the futility of war'. This then leads them on to 'repudiate and renounce violence'. We leave behind the fields of Flanders as it continues: 'As Protestants and Catholics, we apologise for the terrible deeds we have done to each other and ask forgiveness.' It then calls upon the fetishized power of the memorial, the deaths of those it commemorates, and the 'memory' of war as a whole, to *require* adherence to the pledge because of the *origin* of the appeal: '*From this sacred shrine of remembrance where soldiers of all nationalities, creeds and political allegiances were united in death we appeal to all people in Ireland to help build a peaceful and tolerant society*' (my emphasis). This characterisation of the memorial as 'sacred' because based on deaths – constructed here, in contrast to elsewhere in the Park, as 'willing sacrifices' – is typical of the validating function of the war memorial (Warner, 2011: 164; Mosse, 1990). The Pledge goes on to ask the reader to 'remember the

solidarity and trust that developed between Protestant and Catholic Soldiers when they served together in these trenches.’ It concludes by stating that: ‘a fitting tribute to the principles for which men and women from the Island of Ireland died in both World Wars would be permanent peace.’

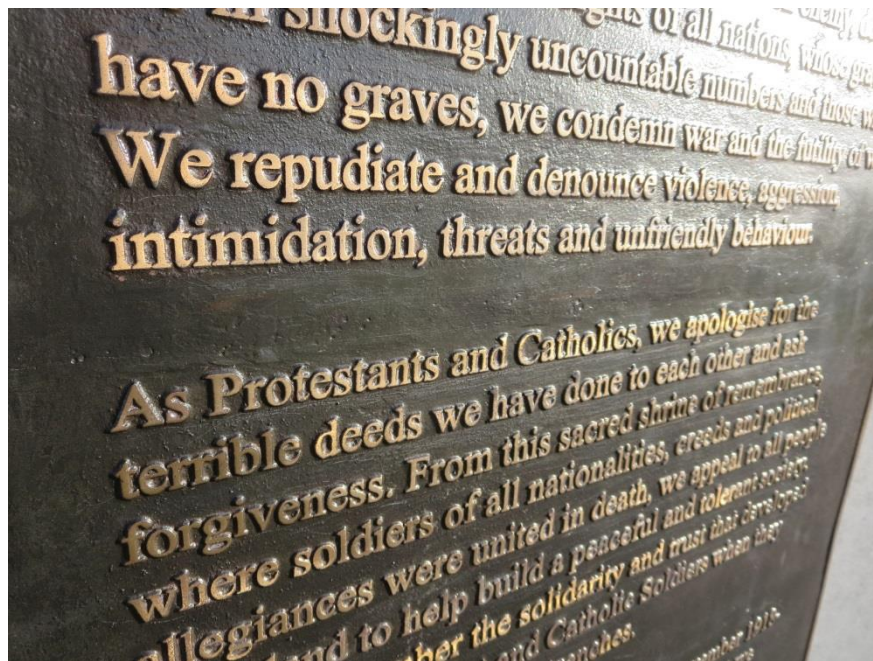


Fig.3. The Peace Pledge (detail): photo John Poulter

Such a declaration deliberately and necessarily fails to specify what these ‘principles’ were in the case of the Great War. Unionists would probably emphasise the mention in the pledge of the ‘defence of democracy’. Nationalists would point to its reference to the ‘rights of all nations’ and Republicans would shake their heads and have to make do with the despairing and accusatory comments on the ‘gravestones’. And ultimately they need not agree on the principles, or lack of them, that motivated engagement in the conflict but simply acknowledge the *outcome* of such action. It is the shared ‘collective memory’ of death and injury that enables this place to work to bring together such opposed

groups as IRA and UVF paramilitaries. And in making these connections it could be seen as working to create not only a new collective memory but indeed, following Halbwachs' argument, a new collective (2011: 143). If a memory is shared by a group this unites the group and identifies it to itself and its Others (Durkheim 1915). As a new collective memory is formed so a new *group* is formed. Who they are united with, identify themselves as and identify themselves against shifts. And the memorial encourages one 'collective' memory of the losses of both the Great War and the Troubles.

Other interventions have been made in the discourse of Remembrance that have opened it up to new perspectives, new questions and new meanings. Graham and Shirlow (2002) argued that increased remembrance of the Somme, a key 'identity narrative' for Loyalists due to the history of the UVF/36th, can be read as an attempt to construct a stronger sense of Loyalist identity that is not dependent on official unionism, sectarian Orangeism or distant Britain. Instead it emphasises the historical and continuing exploitation and betrayal of the protestant loyal working class by all three. Such an analysis would suggest that it is not just family histories of life and death in the trenches that are shared with working class republicans. The possibilities such perceived commonalities might have opened up may well have subsequently receded with the relative decline of the Progressive Unionist Party and the loss of such powerful voices as their leader David Ervine and mentor Gusty Spence. Indeed Brown (2007) rejects Graham and Shirlow's analysis, seeing instead an emphasis on the British link. Yet he too identifies the use of the link to the Somme by Loyalist political leaders as enabling them, through its conferral of authority and authenticity through a memory of historical sacrifice, to communicate difficult messages to their supporters and thus facilitate movement in the politics of the peace process.

The field of publishing has seen a trickle of works in the 1990s dealing with Irish involvement in the war turn into a flood. Lucy and McClure's (1997) *Remembrance* is a good example of a text that, like the

Peace Park, features a range of voices and perspectives not normally heard in the discourse of Remembrance in Northern Ireland. These include the contribution of well-known socialist writer and activist Eamonn McCann who uses the opportunity to state: 'When we think of the Somme, as we should every year, we should rage against those responsible for sending young men of Ulster, and from all corners of Ireland and Britain, out to die so uselessly, in such droves.' (p.128) These words, appearing in a publication of the Ulster Society, gain power through the novelty of their intervention in such a space. Starrett's words at the Peace Park have a not dissimilar power both through their break with the usual memorial language of pride and duty and also their physicality: they are literally carved in stone. In granite. And all we have learnt of such words, chiselled into the masonry of memory, and echoing from the mouths of the 'sacred' dead gives them significant power in the shaping of the discourse, in the shaping of our understanding of the meaning of war.

The Malleability of Meaning: Intertextual remembering

In exploring the meaning and potential impact of the Peace Park we need to acknowledge that its meaning is dependent on its mobilisation in practices and that these practices are shaped by the operation of power. In Northern Ireland examples of this have included James Craig's statement, at the unveiling of the Coleraine Great War memorial, and as part of what became a popular annual display of Unionism and Britishness, that the message from the war dead was 'to stand firm and give away none of Ulster's soil' (Jeffery, 2013: 119). Thus, for those who heard and agreed with his words the memorial took on the meaning of an example and encouragement to defend the Unionist status of the new statelet. By contrast the Great War memorial in Milltown Cemetery on Belfast's Republican Falls Road, standing a stone's throw from the elaborate and well-tended Republican plots, was, until recently,

neglected, deserted and casually damaged. Its patent lack of use and abandonment constructed *its* meaning and that of the war itself as an irrelevance and not part of the memory and lives of the local population.

These examples illustrate Rigney's observation that 'it is only through the mediation of cultural practices that figures of memory can acquire shape, meaning and a high public profile within particular communities' (2010: 345). This mediation is not a one-off event but an ongoing process. The same meaning could be reproduced and thus maintained but it is also possible, and likely, that the text will take on a new meaning as its use is adapted to suit the purposes of particular groups in the present (for example see Bushaway, 1992 and Kovacs, 2015). For Nora, this is what makes such *lieux de mémoire*, or 'sites of memory', so interesting.

For although it is true that the fundamental purpose of a *lieu de mémoire* is to stop time, to inhibit forgetting, to fix a state of things, to immortalize death, and to materialize the immaterial [...] it is also clear that *lieux de mémoire* thrive only because of their capacity for change, their ability to resurrect old meanings and generate new ones along with new and unforeseeable connections (1996: 15).

In Northern Ireland such unforeseeable connections have included the discursive construction, primarily through memorial texts and particularly street murals, of an equivalence between soldiers of the Great War and Loyalist paramilitaries. Masked paramilitaries with Armalites stand next to soldiers in Great War uniforms with Lee Enfields. Both bow their heads to a row of poppy-strewn war graves whilst on the horizon a piper plays a lament. These and other murals also contain the vocabulary of Remembrance being mobilised in the honouring of dead paramilitaries: 'Lest we Forget', 'We will Remember them', 'In Remembrance', 'In Memory of Ulster's Fallen', 'They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old'. The

use of such textual resources in such practices changes the meaning of the overall discourse of Remembrance and inevitably works to further alienate nationalists, still not completely free of the fear of Loyalist violence, from engagement with any aspect of it. Likewise the ongoing activities of the British Army also make it difficult for various groupings within society to feel comfortable with a set of Remembrance texts and practices that pay respect to not just the British dead of the World Wars but also of these more recent conflicts. The fact that these conflicts include several decades of engagement in Ireland also alienates those who feared violence at their hands.

The Peace Park and other memorials that focus predominantly on the Great War, stress the role of nationalists in the war, and pose strong critiques of the conflict, attempt to elide or work against such problematic elements of Remembrance. The tours organised by Glen Barr's International School for Peace Studies (ISPS) construct a narrative, using an accumulation of interpretations of a carefully ordered set of battlefield monuments and the example of the shared history of the 36th and 16th divisions, both to encourage an optimistic perspective on the potential for 'cross-community' cooperation in Northern Ireland and also to warn of the potential consequences of any return to war on the island.³ In such ways do 'memory choreographers' (Allen, 2015: 28) do their work.

Yet the meaning of the Park is still, of course, subject to the perspectives and needs of different readers. As Rigney observes, memory initiatives involve 'multiple actors who are not always reading from the same page' (2012: 253). This is perhaps most ironically illustrated by the fact that the two founders of the project, Glen Barr and Paddy Harte, fell out – apparently over the *meaning* of the monument. (Harte managed to complete a whole book on the project without once mentioning his co-chair by name. Barr warns that, in his book, he won't be so nice...). Barr complains that Harte wished the Tower to become a sacred site for Irish nationalists as a counterpart to the role the Ulster Tower plays for Unionists. The

letterhead of Harte's subsequent organisation 'A Journey of Remembering' displayed the two symbols in such opposition. This approach is an example of what David Fitzpatrick, one of the first writers in Ireland to encourage a re-engagement with Ireland's past in the war, believes to be an inherent problem with recent attempts to retell this story. Constructing such simplistic dichotomies as 36th/16th or Unionist/Nationalist leads to the oversimplifying of what was a much more complex political and cultural landscape (2013: 126). As Graff-McRae observes, much commemorative practice can thus also 'serve to reinforce and re-inscribe lines of conflict while attempting (or claiming) to eradicate them' (2010: 95). Barr's position, that the Guillemont Cross and the Ulster Tower could be used in such a way but that the Round Tower should be developed as a symbol and a site for all, acknowledges present perspectives and affiliations but offers up a common alternative open to a more complex range of subjectivities. King's observation that memorial building has often had a main function of social unification can be usefully applied to this project - despite the founders' subsequent disagreements.

The unanimity that had, ultimately, to be achieved in order to realize the project, announced in advance the transcendent, unifying character of the memorial. It showed that such unanimity was not merely an ideal, but could be achieved in practice when the living adequately remembered their dead. (1999: 165)

Whilst the memory work aimed at reconciliation and involving Remembrance has found a great deal of support on the island and achieved some visible changes in relationships, particularly between Republicans and Loyalists (McCaffrey, 2003; also interviews with Glen Barr and Sinn Féin's Tom Hartley), it can be criticised on certain grounds. For example, the prime participants in most commemorations of military losses are the military organisations themselves in the form of senior officers, military bands and flag-bearers, veterans organisations and others with a close affinity for and support of the military.

All this shapes the discourse of Remembrance in a way that could be seen to 'militate' against attempts to *challenge* the glory of fighting and death. It also presents the military, and in Northern Ireland the paramilitary groups, with recurrent opportunities to perform their role as sacred defenders of morality and life and to reconfirm their hierarchical position in this ritual enactment of the 'cult' (Bastide, 2011: 160).

Brian Hanley is one who perceives the development in Ireland of an uncritical attitude to the Great War as a result of increased engagement with Remembrance which he describes as attempts 'not just to remember but to justify and embrace' the war (2013: 109). Whilst this can be a danger at any memorial depending upon the meanings it produces the Island of Ireland Peace Park *does* contain the symbolic resources, e.g. the critical voices of those who fought, to encourage a use that challenges the dominant militarised memory of the war. This has been made possible by the inclusion of previously excluded voices and also by the passage of time. These voices can be understood as the 'traces' (Burkhardt cited by A. Assman, 2010: 98) left behind and stored in the 'archive'. They are, as described by Peter Burke 'the skeletons in the cupboard of social memory' (2011: 192). When 'the time is right' or, to demystify it, when power working through a variety of institutions allows, encourages and supports the presentation of such interventions in the discourse, these 'cupboards', the archives of the professional historian, the public storyteller and the keepers of the family secrets, are opened up and these traces transfer from the archive to the canon of active 'memories' of the past. Thus, the work of the 'memory entrepreneurs' (Jelin, 2003), Harte and Barr, bore fruit due to the support of a range of influential institutions.

In the case of the Peace Park some of the key institutions that enabled this change were the various militaristic groups engaged in the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The paramilitary ceasefires, in particular, enabled the Park to be built and then used as a site for both formal and informal commemorative

practices which used the 'shared sacrifice' of Messines to attempt reconciliation across the divides of the more recent conflict. The most widely reported of these practices may have been events such as the opening that brought together the Irish and British heads of state but at least as significant have been the many trips, organised largely by Barr's ISPS, that have brought many mixed 'cross-community' groups as well as groups from Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) clubs, Orange Lodges, and also, crucially, separate and mixed groups of ex-paramilitaries, from 'both sides' of these divides to share the experience of the Park and the many other memorials of the Western Front. On such 'neutral ground', away from the demarcated spaces of home, and with this example of shelved difference, shared experience and universal loss, these groups are encouraged, by the memorial texts in the Park and beyond, to reflect on their own experience of conflict and, through the practice of their joint visits, on the humanity of their Other. This results in what one ex-Loyalist paramilitary and regular tour participant describes as 'a road to Damascus experience' which he has observed not only in himself but also in almost all who undertake the tour. Thus, this unheroic monument, with its grim and bitter constructions of the discourse of conflict, and with its meanings constructed through such imaginative use, serves also as a Troubles memorial.

No permanent public monument to all these deaths exists in Northern Ireland. The Island of Ireland Peace Park, through an ostensible focus on events of long ago and far away, can be read as intertextually raising the 'memory' of all deaths through conflict and, in particular, those of the Troubles. This can be understood to work with an added strength for those combatants who have made sense of their own role in the conflict through placing it within a discourse of martial duty and patriotism. This could be argued to work particularly strongly within Loyalist paramilitary circles due to their explicit intertextual construction of the equivalence between themselves and soldiers of the Great

War. It does not explicitly address the deaths of non-combatants: those who, as Anne Dolan puts it, just 'carried on carrying on' (2013: 151) and in this it remains consistent with the vast majority of war memorials. However, in intertextually translating the waste of the trenches to the streets of Northern Ireland it implicitly draws in those victims of a conflict where the lines between combatant and civilian were less clearly drawn.

This 'Irish' case has arisen in a particular context and cannot simply be replicated elsewhere but its example encourages us to consider how, particularly at a time of a renewed focus on the Great War, we can produce public texts that could, through a use of 'memory' traces of the Great War, construct bridges of commonality across divided populations and simultaneously challenge the glorification of violent conflict.

Barr's Peace School has taken over 6000 visitors from Northern Ireland to Messines. The experience has been praised by individuals from across the perceived political spectrum in the region. As one participant, in an interview with the author, described part of the tour:

And then we heard about the battle at [Messines] where they actually fought side-by-side. And Private Meek helped Major Redmond. And they worked together. And if they could work together – two groups who really hated each other ... that there is this shared history. And then we can have a shared future. It was a very powerful message. [...] I think everybody came back totally changed. Eyes opened.⁴

The ISPS has established the 'Fellowship of Messines' and local 'Friends of Messines' groups to support individuals who have been to Messines in sustaining, deepening and extending new connections and going on to lead conflict transformation initiatives in their own communities across Northern Ireland. A

report on the Messines project commissioned by the North East Peace Partnership concluded that: 'The impact of this programme is likely to be very significant in the years to come in terms of being a precipitator for other peace building activities at local level.' (Blu Zebra, 2011: 89) It saw the project as so effective that it recommended not only that it should be included in the school curriculum but that it should also be part of the induction process for all elected local politicians (ibid: 94). The School Links project run by the ISPS already brings together pupils from different backgrounds on trips to Messines during which, as one teacher explained, their perspectives change radically:

The young people went to Messines as one kind of person and came back another, fired up to promote change and tolerance in their own country. [...] The shift in attitudes, a shift that I have been battling so hard to create in my own classroom for over a decade, was happening in front of my own eyes in the space of six days.⁵

Conclusion

The Island of Ireland Peace Park is an example of a *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1996) whose conception, design and use exploit the malleability of the meaning of such phenomena. It constructs a story of the past using 'forgotten' 'traces' and, in the process, transfers them from the archive of 'passive' memory to the canon of 'active' memory (A. Assman 2010). In doing this it aims to redress the imbalance in the dominant discourse, or collective memory, of Irish involvement in the Great War. It works to reinsert the story of the patriotic Irish nationalists who, in their tens of thousands, responded to their political leaders calls to enlist in the British Army and died, in their thousands, in the Flanders mud and elsewhere. In reshaping the memory of the war in this way it offers it up as a potential shared memory

across current political and conflictual divides. It uses shared memory to make possible a potential sense of shared identity, to break down some of the hierarchical binaries (Derrida, 1976) that shape the Irish/British political landscape, and to work towards the potential to construct a *new, combined, 'collective'*.

At the same time, through its choice of 'traces' to carve into granite, it intervenes in the discursively constructed (Foucault, 1972) memory of the Great War. The eye-witness quotes selected mostly break with the stock approaches to memorialisation of the war – the 'myth' (Barthes, 1972) of honour, glory and sacrifice – and instead construct the war as horrific, brutal, and exploitative. This positions the memorial as an unheroic '*anti-war* memorial'. Such critical perspectives had to be included if the monument hoped to be able to be accessible to the various political groups on the island. Yet it was also the passage of time that allowed this monument to take a more critical stance towards the war than the mass of memorials constructed in the 1920s and 1930s. This alerts us to the possibility, particularly during the centenary years, of reshaping the discourse of the war more widely through the imaginative design of new memorials.

This critique of the war was, in the case of the Peace Park, part of an explicit project that aimed to use this story of the past to shape the politics of the present. As well as the explicit linking of the Great War with present day Northern Ireland in the 'Peace Pledge' at the Park, it also works intertextually to build on discursive work on the streets of Northern Ireland which has long established an equivalence between paramilitaries and soldiers, and particularly between Loyalist paramilitaries and soldiers of the Great War, to encourage a reading of its anti-war sentiments as relevant to the Northern Irish Troubles. In this neutral space, far from the demarcated territory of Northern Ireland, the tragic consequences for all parties in such conflicts can be acknowledged. In the process the monument, through allusion and

intertextuality, can function as not only a Great War memorial but also a Troubles memorial. This unspoken meaning is communicated to visitors through the narrative constructed by the International School for Peace Studies guides which emphasises shared suffering and the necessity of cooperation. Their practice of bringing mixed groups from across the divides in Northern Ireland, including ex-paramilitaries, to the Park and nearby monuments encourages this reading to be produced in the key groups in the conflict and taken back by them to the streets of the North. This is supported by the Fellowship of Messines and Friends of Messines schemes which encourage individuals who have undergone the 'Messines Experience' to communicate this memory and perspective more widely and lead conflict transformation initiatives in their local communities.

The texts in the Park are given meaning by these practices of remembering and all this is facilitated, encouraged and shaped by those institutions with the power to intervene in these discourses. These, for this project, have included national governments, local councils, the business community, historians both professional and amateur, community groups of all kinds across Northern Ireland and beyond, and, crucially, the paramilitary groups. The engagement of all of these has enabled a remembering and questioning of memories of both the conflict in the mud of Flanders and in the streets and lanes of Ireland. Changes in perspective on one can lead to changes in perspective on the other and, in the course of this, a recognition of that shared suffering that Renan (1882) saw as, tragically, the key ingredient for a sense of nation.

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Notes:

1. The 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland refers to the conflict, from 1968-1998, involving various groups including 'Irish' nationalists/republicans e.g. the IRA, 'Ulster'/'British' Unionists/Loyalists e.g. the UVF, and the British Government and Army. Whilst this conflict is not yet 'resolved' it became less murderous and more located within the arena of politics after the paramilitary ceasefires of 1997, the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement of 1998 and the subsequent departure of much of the British Army presence.
2. Information on this tour taken from interviews by author with Glen Barr and Tom Burke (Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association) and also from Harte (2010).
3. Information on these tours taken from interviews by author with Glen Barr (2015) and with GAA and ex-paramilitary members of tour groups (2011 to 2016).
4. Author's interview with member of GAA group.
5. <http://www.schoolforpeace.com/content/testimonials/40> [accessed 4.1.2016]

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